

GAMES

Custer's Lewd Stand

Clad only in hat and boots, Little Big Horn loser chases Indian woman and whips up national imbroglio.

BY JOHN P. MELLO JR.

80 MICRO NEWS EDITOR

From coast to coast, a microcomputer game depicting the alleged rape of an Indian woman by General George Armstrong Custer has been slammed by concerned groups. But the pasting "Custer's Revenge" has taken in public may only fuel sales, according to two blue marketeers.

"I think the controversy is going to accelerate the game's sales considerably," contended Daniel Ellis, publisher of *The Dirty Book*, a twice-a-year listing of "erotic" software.

Asked how the Custer's Revenge flap would affect his games, J. P. Nelson said, "I think it can only help them. Nelson, board chairman of Computer Kinetics Corporation located in Westlake Village, CA, explained his firm makes three coin-op games placed "strictly in adult locations."

Stuart Kesten, president of American Multiple Industries in Northridge, CA, reportedly predicts his firm will sell 750,000 copies of Custer's Revenge. If that prediction proves true, the game would gross more than \$3.7 million for American Multiple.

The corporation makes two other blue games—"Bachelor Party" and "Beat'em and Eat'em"—but neither has sparked the outrage caused by Custer's Revenge.

When American Multiple demonstrated the game last October at the National Video and Audio Conference in New York City, some 100 people representing women's and American Indian groups demonstrated against it.

Since Custer's packaging includes a reference to Atari, the game giant entered the melee, claiming its good name had been sullied. It alleged American Multiple had tried to cash in on Atari's trademark and filed a lawsuit against the American Multiple in federal district court in Los Angeles.

Legal action against American Multiple is also contemplated by the American Indian Movement.

Meanwhile, local governments joined



the controversy. In the Sooner state, the Oklahoma City City Council adopted resolutions condemning the game. And the Los Angeles Board of County Supervisors adopted a three-pronged attack against it.

Opponents of Custer rail the game because they claim it condones rape, is racist, and is sexist.

Betty Rosenstein, head of the Los Angeles County Commission on the Status of Women, declared, "We are horrified that there are games in which entertainment of the players comes from the act of rape and sexual assault against women."

"We are very disturbed at its idea that rape is acceptable, that it's supposed to be fun," observed Helen Parolla, director of New York City's YWCA Center for Public Policy.

The National Organization for Women also found the game offensive. Among its objections: The game trivializes the pain and humiliation suffered by the one in three women raped in her lifetime and promotes the idea a manly man is a rapist.

"It's making the player of the game a

third-party participant in the rape," noted a spokesperson for Women Against Pornography in New York City. "This is a new dynamic. In the past, a person has been a viewer of pornography, not a participant. You are maneuvering Custer over to the Indian woman tied to a post. You're maneuvering him to rape her."

"It rewards a player for rape," she said. "That's how you win the game. It's making rape something to be rewarded for."

The spokesperson's comments become more sobering in light of recent findings in *The Journal of Communication* published by the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

In a study of pornography, Penn researchers discovered male and female students who watched a large number of blue movies found rape less objectionable than similar students who watched nonerotic films over the same period of time.

Repeated attempts by *80 Micro* to reach American Multiple's president by telephone failed. However, Custer's creator, Joel Miller, reportedly denies the 7th Calvary's fearless leader rapes anyone. "He's seducing her," Miller is quoted as saying, "but she's a willing participant."

Kesten told wire service reporters: "Our object is not to arouse; our object is to entertain. When people play our games, we want them smiling. We want them laughing."

"The idea of the game itself is to have fun, not just to have a cheap sexual joke," he said. "These games are not meant to arouse and I would wonder about anyone being sexually aroused by them."

Custer's detractors also found the game racist.

Resolutions adopted by the Oklahoma City City Council stated, "Responsible citizens representing all segments of society are repulsed both by the vulgarity of this video game and its calculated insult to minority groups in

America."

And in a letter to Kesten, YWCA National President Jewel Freeman Graham and National Executive Director Sara-Alyce P. Wright declaimed:

"It is a sad symbolism in our society when the sexual overpowering of a nude Indian woman by an American general is considered by your company either comedy, victory, or fun. The blatant racism of a white male attacking an Indian woman in this suggestive manner contributes to the continuation of a racist-sexist society."

The National Organization for Women declared the game promoted the acceptability of raping Indian women, masked and trivialized the racial genocide practiced by the real Custer, and used the new technology to degrade the American Indian community rather than advance ideas of equality and humanity.

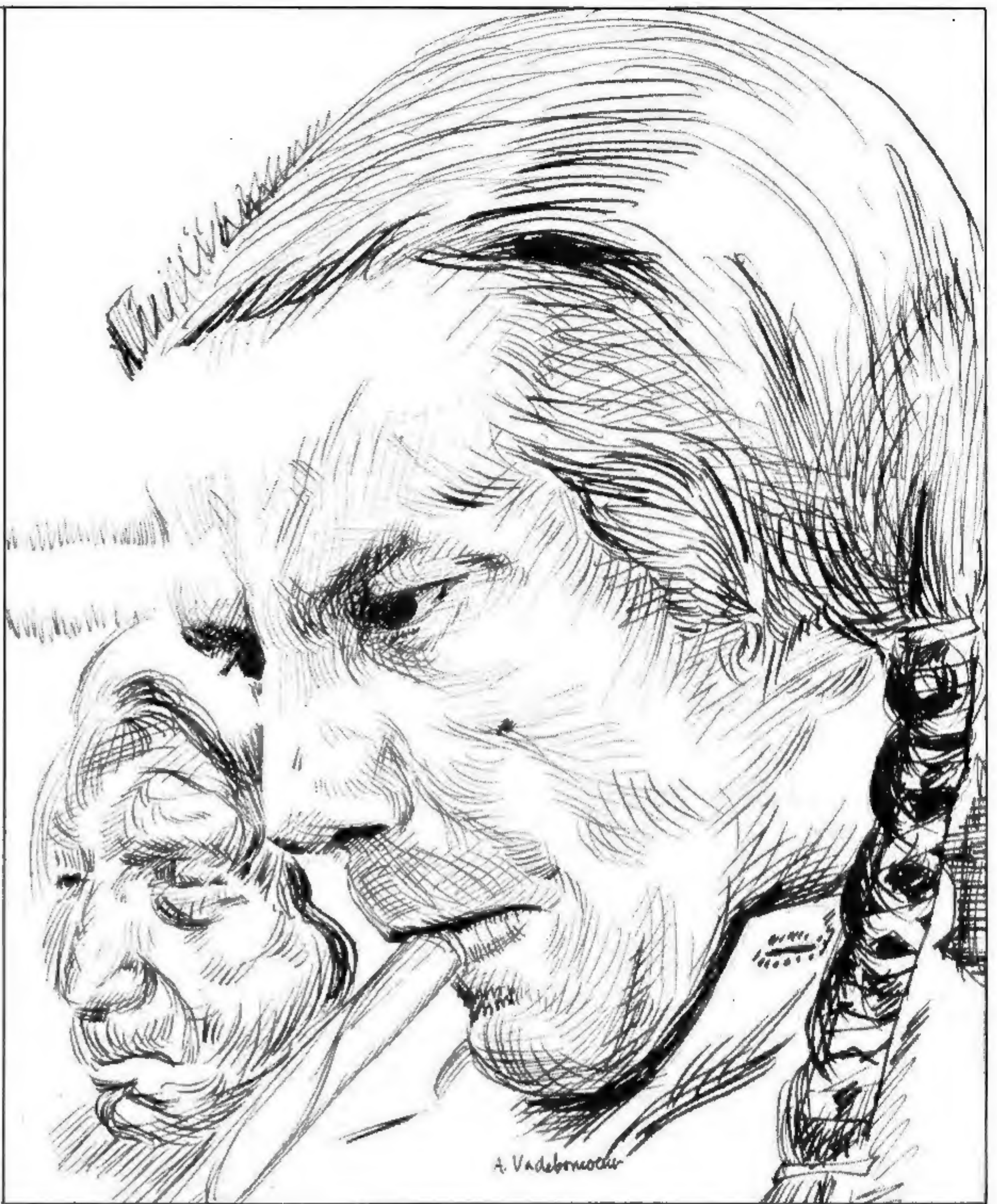
"As American Indians," said Rudy Martin, public relations director for the American Indian Community House in New York City, "we are vehemently opposed to the exploitive use of our race for the titillation of the public. We see this disgusting video game for what it really is: a sexist, racist, sadistic expression, the sole purpose of which is to fill the pockets of its creators and promoters."

He asked: "Would the characterization of a people be acceptable if it depicted Begin attacking a Palestinian woman, Prince Charles chasing a female IRA member, or Hitler having his way with a naked Jewish maiden? We think not."

"Tomorrow it will be an attack against someone black or brown or homosexual," Rosenstein of L.A. County added. "And then an assassination against a president. Do we want to live in a community with that kind of sickness?"

"The only result this game will have," Martin said, "will be to promote a casual attitude toward racism, a misguided sense of white, male superiority, and the reenforcing of the stereotyping of American Indians as something less than human."

He called the game "a statement of the deterioration of what was proclaimed proudly as American society" and said "it serves only to perpetuate the violent and sexist characterization of American people in the eyes of the world."



Banks: Strung-out lawsuit.

"We have enough sickness and violence in our community without adding more to it," Rosenstein observed. "I guess the real question is, do we really want to have a community where recreation is based on humiliating and degrading and dehumanizing women."

Apparently, these issues were less nettlesome to Atari, lambasted for making the medium for Custer's unsavory video deeds.

"Atari takes a very dim view of this use of our product," Atari Consumer Products Division President Michael Moone said in a statement.

"We are quite upset," he continued, "with someone who has chosen to use our product for a purpose which was not intended.

"We intended the product for whole-

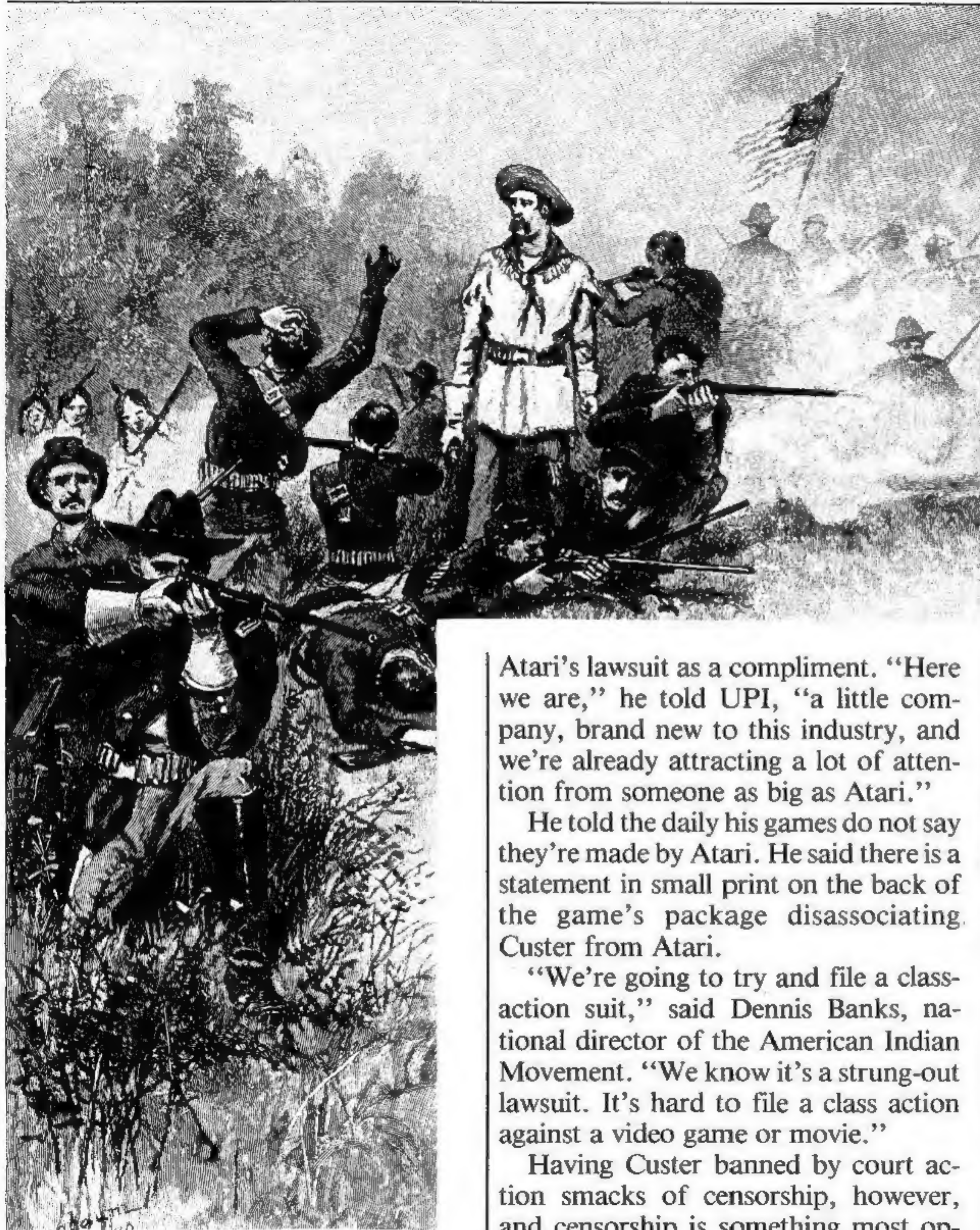
some family entertainment, but to say that Atari is responsible for this occurrence would be as illogical as censoring a camera company for making cameras because a few people take pornographic photographs."

Although Custer's opponents want the game banned, they realize the law offers them little recourse.

"Unfortunately," lamented Moone of Atari, "some individuals take refuge behind certain legal precepts to the dismay of the majority of the people."

"We're not looking to run into the First Amendment," Atari attorney Kenneth J. Nussbacher told the *New York Times*. He said American Multiple failed to adequately disassociate itself from Atari and capitalized on Atari's name and trademark.

Kesten of American Multiple saw



Atari's lawsuit as a compliment. "Here we are," he told UPI, "a little company, brand new to this industry, and we're already attracting a lot of attention from someone as big as Atari."

He told the daily his games do not say they're made by Atari. He said there is a statement in small print on the back of the game's package disassociating Custer from Atari.

"We're going to try and file a class-action suit," said Dennis Banks, national director of the American Indian Movement. "We know it's a strung-out lawsuit. It's hard to file a class action against a video game or movie."

Having Custer banned by court action smacks of censorship, however, and censorship is something most op-

ponents to the game are shying away from.

"We are not talking of censoring," Rosenstein of L.A. County observed. "We are talking about sensitizing the community."

However, the three-point plan Rosenstein's commission proposed and L.A.'s county supervisors adopted included drafting legislation to prohibit video games like Custer and instructing the county's counsel to study adopting a similar ordinance on the local level.

Glynis Edgar, director of community relations for the Oklahoma Human Rights Commission, said her agency hopes the anti-Custer resolutions adopted by the Oklahoma City City Council "will discourage folks from buying [the game] and discourage stores from wanting to have it."

She added, "By no means are we advocating it be banned."

But Edgar admitted when one adult book store owner in Oklahoma City was contacted by opponents to Custer after the city council's action, it was apparent he wasn't going to be deterred from carrying the game.

Atari called on all concerned parents to write American Multiple and "hope the public outcry will persuade the maker to remove their product from the market."

How effective will that be?

"Stuart Kesten," Banks said, "told our people he has invested too much money in it to bring it off the market." ■